United Nations E/CN.17/2001/PC/9

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
14 March 2001

Original: English

Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development
Organizational session
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*
30 April-2 May 2001
Progress in preparatory activities for the World Summit on Sustainable Development at the local, national, subregional, regional and international levels, as well as by major groups

Sustainable human settlements development and environmentally sound management of solid wastes**

Report of the Secretary-General

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–3	2
II.	Promoting sustainable human settlements development	4–18	2
	A. Improved urban management	8–11	3
	B. Improved infrastructure and services	12–14	3
	C. Shelter for all	15–18	4
III.	Environmentally sound management of solid wastes for sustainable human settlements	19–29	4
	A. Minimizing wastes	19–22	4
	B. Promoting environmentally sound waste disposal, treatment and recycling	23–26	4
	C. Extending waste service coverage	27–29	5
IV.	Issues for further consideration	30–36	5

* E/CN.17/2001/PC/1.

** The present report was prepared by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements as task manager for chapters 7 and 21 of Agenda 21, with contributions from other United Nations bodies and international organizations. The report is a brief factual overview designed to inform the Commission of key developments in the subject area.

01-29269 (E) 090401

I. Introduction

1. Current conditions of human settlements worldwide, as documented in the third *Global Report on Human Settlements* currently being finalized for presentation at the five-year review of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), are a cause of great concern. Despite the continued efforts of Governments and their partners, widespread urban poverty remains and the living environment has not been significantly improved in most countries. The development of sustainable human settlements, as called for in chapter 7 of Agenda 21 and reconfirmed in the Habitat Agenda, remains a challenge to all stakeholders, including women, in all countries. Meeting the challenge requires policy responses that are based on the principles of partnership, participation and decentralization. Further, it goes without saying that the human settlements dimensions of overall sustainable development should encompass both rural and urban areas.

2. Increasing rates of solid waste production in both developed and developing countries have created serious constraint to the improvement of environmental and health conditions of human settlements. Environmentally sound management of solid wastes needs to be addressed in local and national strategies aimed at promoting sustainable human settlements development.

3. The present report reviews accomplishments and constraints in both areas. To the extent possible, it establishes the links between sustainable human settlements development and environmentally sound management of solid wastes.

II. Promoting sustainable human settlements development

4. Some achievements have been made at the international, regional, national and local levels to mainstream the principles of partnership, participation and decentralization and to identify good practices in their implementation in an integrated manner. Strides forward have been made in terms of a growing legitimization of citizens' groups, grass-roots organizations and civic leaders, particularly at the local level. Partnership has been established at the international, national and local levels between the private sector, Governments, local authorities and other actors of civil society. Decentralization has made significant steps forward since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Following the Fourth World Conference on Women, gender responsiveness has become increasingly recognized as a particularly relevant issue in relation to participation, urban governance and decision-making, as well as to the issue of equal access to land, property and inheritance rights.

5. A number of international urban environment programmes, such as the "Localizing Agenda 21" programme of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the joint Habitat/United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) "Sustainable cities programme" promote and support such environment-development principles, broad participatory and system-wide cross-sectoral processes in major city demonstration projects, inter-agency cooperation, and national replication programmes. The "Local Agenda 21 programme" of the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) is another example specializing in increasing the awareness, commitment and contribution of local authorities to sustainable human settlements development and global environmental management. ICLEI's cooperation helps to prevent duplication, to achieve economies of scale, to promote learning from each other's experiences, and to disseminate lessons learned to as wide as possible an audience, such as through ICLEI participation in the UEF.

6. Among the obstacles to the promotion of sustainable human settlements development are a lack of implementation of partnerships, insufficiency in creating a level playing field whereby the interests and aspirations of politically weak members of society can truly influence decision-making processes and legislative reform, and the gap between the transfer of responsibilities and the devolution of powers, resources and revenue-generation mechanisms.

7. Central to the development of sustainable human settlements remains the mobilization of sufficient human and financial resources to enhance the capacities and improve the conditions for promoting the transfer of good practice, supporting central-local government partnership in policy-making, translating good policy into effective and sustainable local action, and enhancing the opportunities of the poor, the excluded and the marginalized to fully participate in

and benefit from the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda.

A. Improved urban management

8. Significant progress has been made in various countries and cities to devise mechanisms to implement good urban governance. This progress can be categorized in three broad strategies, namely, to promote decentralization and strengthen local authorities; to encourage participation and civic engagement; and to ensure transparent, accountable and efficient governance of cities.

9. Constitutional reforms that provide periodic elections, independent parliament and devolution of power and responsibilities to local governments have facilitated decentralization and strengthened local authorities. Systems of laws and budgeting procedures have been developed to support local authorities in undertaking new responsibilities. Such systems have also facilitated the widening of the tax base for the local authorities. Several excellent capacity-building programmes have been initiated to help local governments become more effective, responsive and accountable to their citizens.

10. Governments at various levels have undertaken interventions that facilitate effective stakeholder consultation processes and strengthen political, administrative and financial interventions at the local level. Through pressure on city governments, the significant development of citizens' organizations has demanded greater participation in governance and has highlighted the need for greater equity in the definition of investment priorities.

11. Issues of good governance have been addressed in collaboration between public and private bodies at various levels, including public-private partnerships, contractual procedures and co-funding mechanisms. In this context, specific measures have been implemented to enhance transparency and accountability in local authorities, including transparent tendering procedures, independent audit reports, measures to reduce corruption, provisions for regular disclosure of assets of public officials and elected representatives, public feedback mechanisms, such as report cards, publication of documentation on the entire planning and participation process in both large and small-scale projects, and open and free debates on urban and good governance issues in the media. United Nations bodies are actively supporting improved urban governance, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through its Bureau for Development Policy and Habitat through its Global Campaign for Good Urban Governance.

B. Improved infrastructure and services

12. Although commendable efforts have been undertaken to increase the coverage of infrastructure and services, the overall number of people without access to basic services is still increasing. Many development assistance agencies and the private sector have started working directly with communities and small-scale independent service providers. Their efforts have been complemented by programmes aimed at building partnerships between local authorities and service providers and communities. Local Agenda 21 S, sustainable cities demonstrations or similar arrangements helped in creating the necessary framework conditions for such partnerships, including mobilization of resources, allocation of responsibilities, accountability of participating stakeholders and establishing mechanisms for sharing of risks and benefits.

13. In many countries, the infrastructure sector has undergone sector reforms to attract urgently required capital. Innovative financing mechanisms, in addition to the usual funds from multilateral and bilateral agencies, target investments directly from the private sector to commercialized utilities and service providers. In this context, new partnerships between the private sector and communities have evolved and proven fruitful.

14. Strategies for conservation and demand management are considered an important tool for local authorities to better manage infrastructure and services. In the first instance, service providers develop long-term strategies to assess and manage the demand for services within the framework of nature conservation as well as action plans to address consumer demands. These strategies and plans allow local authorities to increase efficiency and equity in service provision and mobilize resources. In the water sector, for example, catchment management agencies have been established, which have the mandate to coordinate all actors at the national, provincial and local levels affecting water resources of cities.

C. Shelter for all

15. The concentration of poverty, homelessness and slums is increasingly associated with the growth of the world's urban populations. This urban growth is mostly informal and unplanned, often resulting in people settling on unwanted and dangerous locations. In the last 10 years, it has become all too apparent that conditions for the world poor have continued to deteriorate.

16. Informal settlements exist and expand because of the inadequate provision of land, speculative investments patterns, a tendency towards over-regulation, and a regulatory framework of standards, regulations and administrative procedures that is at best indifferent and more often hostile to the needs of the urban poor.

17. The issue of tenure security is recognized as central both in rural and urban areas. One key to sustainable rural development is legally secure access to assets by the rural poor and the landless. A likely result of insecure tenure in the accelerating urbanization processes is that the rural poor will become the urban poor, where the same issues of tenure insecurity prevail. The extension of tenure security is a key element of any integrated approach to improving the access of the urban poor, not only to shelter and other basic social services but also to employment opportunities and direct political representation.

18. In promoting the "Shelter for all" objective, the Global Campaign for Secure Tenure initiative, spearheaded by Habitat, aims to help create conditions for improved access to shelter for the world's poor, particularly in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Central to the Campaign initiative is a policy framework which recognizes the importance of engaging the world's poor as active developmental partners. The Global Campaign for Secure Tenure initiative is linked to the Global Campaign on Urban Governance, aimed at improving local governance systems.

III. Environmentally sound management of solid wastes for sustainable human settlements

A. Minimizing wastes

19. Waste production rates in both developed and developing countries are increasing at unprecedented rates. What used to be a modest task for municipalities has now become a major environmental problem. The waste produced by a city is directly related to its relative wealth. Low-density wastes contain large amounts of packaging, plastics and paper produced by affluent societies. High-density wastes with a high moisture content are produced by less affluent societies. Different types of waste require different treatment/disposal options.

20. The proportion of hazardous waste from households/small industries/medical clinics has increased. There is little control and a number of specific wastes are discharged uncontrolled into the environment. Most local authorities/private contractors are not set up to deal with such dispersed forms of waste production.

21. Municipal authorities often spend between 20 and 30 per cent of their budget on cleaning and waste disposal. The vast majority of this expenditure, around 70 per cent, is related to transportation costs. The cost increases are further exacerbated by poor collection efficiency due to poor vehicle routing and planning and inadequate maintenance.

22. Increasing land prices and availability in or around the urban centres make waste disposal increasingly difficult and costly. Finding a suitable site that offers an economically sound disposal option is becoming increasingly difficult.

B. Promoting environmentally sound waste disposal, treatment and recycling

23. In many countries, waste disposal still leaves a lot to be desired. Dumping is uncontrolled and hazardous waste is disposed of with non-hazardous at the same dump sites. This poses a significant hazard not only for waste management workers but also for those who live close to disposal facilities or derive their income from such sources. Many cities are currently close to a crisis

situation with regard to the environmental and health costs related to solid waste management. In fact, some cities have already experienced epidemics that have resulted in significant economic losses from reduced tourism and export potential. The urban poor are the hardest hit in relation to their direct living environment. In developing countries, where a large proportion of the urban poor are involved in waste collection and recycling as a means of income generation, there are severe health hazards associated with scavenging of wastes, particularly among children. There are also significant proportions of vector-borne diseases (such as Dengue fever) whose prevalence can be traced to poor solid waste disposal.

24. Residential waste storage facilities are often inadequate. Containers are not designed to effectively contain putriscible wastes in tropical climates, where waste collection efficiency is poor. In many municipalities, collection efficiency may be less than 30 per cent of waste produced. Landfills gases, such as methane and carbon dioxide produced by the decomposition of waste, contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions. Incineration of waste has to be done in a controlled manner if it is not to be hazardous to the environment. Many incinerators are not operated at optimum temperature to ensure breakdown of hazardous waste to harmless by-products.

25. A large proportion of city waste is organic, as much as 70 per cent in developing regions. Not only is this a resource which should be reclaimed but to use valuable and scarce landfill space is unsustainable. In addition, organic waste disposed to landfill greatly increases greenhouse gas emission. In cities where its reuse in agriculture is a possibility, composting and reuse is a sensible option.

26. Technological advances in recycling have been made in the developed world with increased use of reduced materials, such as the improved quality of recycled paper. However, goods made from raw materials are often preferred to those made from recycled materials, especially in situations where quality of the final product is important.

C. Extending waste service coverage

27. Waste production, unlike many other services or commodities, is difficult to measure, and therefore charges associated with collection volumes and disposal costs are difficult to calculate. Local authorities in particular need more reliable data on production to enable them to charge users for how much they produce and the true cost of disposal. Certain hazardous wastes are expensive to treat in specialized processes. Reliable data on production will also enable waste management services to be streamlined.

28. With the increasing trend towards privatization of services and the drive for increased efficiency, there is an increasing need for legislative frameworks which enable satisfactory regulation of solid waste collection and disposal. The small-scale private waste management sector is often forgotten but can play a key role in an overall city waste management strategy. Privatization contracts and legislation should be flexible enough to permit the participation of small-scale service providers, particularly in the lower-income areas of cities.

29. Despite many examples of good practice from around the world, inappropriate technologies, particularly for solid waste collection, are still common. Collection vehicles are often not suited to extremes in climate or the condition of the roads, which often results in a large proportion of local authority vehicles being out of use. Local technologies should, wherever possible, be adapted or imported technologies redesigned with more appropriate specifications. Also, there is a severe lack of operation and maintenance of solid waste handling equipment. In many local authorities, maintenance is more a question of responding to day-to-day crisis rather than of a preventative nature.

IV. Issues for further consideration

30. The enormous concentration of extreme poverty in the cities raises some difficult policy issues that will need to be addressed within a rights-based approach to development, with special concern for equity among men and women. This approach integrates human rights into the overall development framework, with special concern, for example, for the need to remove social and legal discrimination against women, as is the case with inheritance rights. It relates to the need for improved provision and availability of urban land that is affordable and well located for self-help development.

31. Given the increasingly recognized synergy between rural and urban areas, there is a need to design policy responses which address a need for a balanced urban network, recognizing the links between large cities, small and medium-sized towns and their hinterlands. Sound systems of human settlements are essential for marketing agricultural products and for creating added value from primary inputs. In the end, such systems are critical for the promotion of economic growth, the creation of employment and the eradication of both rural and urban poverty.

32. A challenge in the rapidly increasing infrastructure sector is for countries to put in place effective governance systems and administrative mechanisms to ensure the provision of services in an efficient and equitable manner. A number of international agencies are assisting Governments through capacity-building programmes in this regard.

33. There is an urgent need to raise awareness of the need for effective solid waste management and of its contribution to sustainable human settlements. Specific attention needs to be paid to waste minimization. An efficient solid waste management service should comprise the appropriate combination of public, private and community-level actors, based on the cities needs. Capacity at the city level should focus on the development of simple management information systems, which allow the waste management sectors to optimize the use of service providers.

34. In developing countries, more promotion is needed of informal sector waste recycling. Small-scale waste recycling initiatives provide much-needed income for the urban poor. There are isolated good practices in many cities around the world; they are simply not recognized or replicated.

35. Sharing of information and data on environmentally sound management of solid wastes should be promoted. In monitoring, evaluating and distributing such information and data, the development and use of sustainability indicators would be important.

36. Tighter control of inadequate land disposal requires demonstration of good practices in landfill taxes and other such economic instruments, which can help local authorities to keep tighter control of environmental standards. Solid waste management equipment producers and suppliers need an appropriate forum to ensure production of equipment which is suited to the various differing needs of cities and local authorities around the world. Information on good practices from the informal waste sector in many countries should be factored into the overall solid waste management strategy for particular cities.